

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

207 South Brodie St.

<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

November 29, 2020 First Sunday in Advent

Words of Welcome

Welcome to the start of a new Christian year. Today is the first Sunday of Advent and the beginning of a worship series entitled, *Be Not Afraid*. In a year when things have been so unsettling, it can be helpful to know that the Bible has something to say about the many fears that we may experience and bring us a word of hope.

Call to Worship

The heavens are trembling with anticipation,
And we wait for Jesus.

The nights are long and the days are short,
And we wait for Jesus.

Our redemption is drawing near,
And we wait for Jesus.

Let us hope in God and worship as people ready to see the salvation of our God!

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Advent Candle Lighting Hope

On this first Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of hope. [*Light candle.*] Isaiah gives us a vision of a kingdom yet to come where everything has been made new and where creation is at peace. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:1–3). We light this candle of hope as a sign of our waiting and expectation for the coming Christ.

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Be not Afraid: A Worship Series for Advent By Meg Jenista Kuykendall and Kathryn Roelofs

As we begin this season of waiting, we listen to a centuries old song which speaks to the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies written about in the Book of Isaiah. The rose is Mary, the fulfilment is Jesus.

Hymn

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming

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1. Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
from tender stem hath sprung,
of Jesse's lineage coming,
as prophets long have sung.
It came, a floweret bright,
amid the cold of winter,
when halfspent was the night.

2. Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
the Rose I have in mind;
with Mary we behold it,
the virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright,
she bore to us a Saviour,
when halfspent was the night.

3. This flower, whose fragrance tender
with sweetness fills the air,
dispels with glorious splendour
our darkness everywhere.
True flesh, yet very God,
from sin and death he saves us
and shares our every load.

4. O Saviour, child of Mary,
who felt our human woe,
O Saviour, King of glory,
who dost our weakness know,
bring us at length, we pray,
to the bright courts of heaven
and to the endless day.

Words and Music: public domain

We pray, bringing together our hearts, minds, and bodies before God.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Creator God, You made the heavens and the earth.
You set the planets in their courses, lit the sun with fire,
caused the stars to shine and the world to turn.
Life springs up wherever your breath moves.
In Jesus Christ, you brought hope into a world full of fear and despair.
You sent your Spirit to enliven our hope and guide us on the way.
We are waiting now in anxious times for the world to be made new.
We wait for new life, and we wait with deep hope.

Redeeming God,

We confess that waiting is difficult for us.

**We want to be comfortable in this festive season,
but the pandemic keeps us anxious and unhappy.**

**We complain about our own troubles
and close our eyes to the suffering of others,**

Forgive us for ignoring truths we do not want to see.

Forgive us for seeking our own comfort at the cost of others.

Give us eyes to perceive the great need within our community.

Give us eyes to see the deep need within our own lives.

Turn our hearts to you again and again.

In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

In the midst of all our uncertainty, we are reminded of the old truths, that God loves us, God forgives us, God restores us to new life.

The Child has come, bringing grace, offering mercy, and wrapping us in arms of love! Thanks be to God, we are forgiven. Amen.

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Scripture Readings

❖ **Responsive Reading** — adapted from Psalm 130:5–7, NRSV

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning.

We wait and we hope.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.

We wait and we hope.

Glory to God the Father, to Jesus the Messiah, and to the Holy Spirit.

We wait and we hope. Amen.

❖ **Isaiah 11:1-10**

¹A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

²The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;

⁴but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;

for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the
nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

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The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Reflection The Hopes and Fears of All the Years

Though Isaiah would not have named it, over time this particular piece of scripture has come to be known as “The Peaceable Kingdom”. In the 1800’s Quaker preacher and artist Edward Hick painted this scene of the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion and all the other images described in this passage. He didn’t do it just once but sixty-two times. If you don’t know the paintings, there is a good chance that you have seen a copy and didn’t know it.

There is another painting, not so well known or popularized as Hick’s, that is also very compelling. Using writer, Casey Sigmon’s words, let me describe to you another painting that may be a more contemporary type of peaceable kingdom image that seems particularly visionary given the circumstances we see around the globe. She writes,

The United States Department of Justice established a permanent home in 1935. From 1938-1941, 61 murals funded by the Public Works Arts Project were completed in the Art Deco building. Each mural revealed artistic vision of what justice in this nation should/could look like.

One of the most striking images emerged from the mind of Symeon Shimin, a Russian born immigrant to Brooklyn, New York. In 1938, Shimin was hired to paint a mural, and “[Contemporary Justice and The Child](#)” was born.² It took four years to complete the mural, which can still be seen on the third floor of the Department of Justice building in Washington D.C. today.

Through the eyes of an immigrant, we move from what is to what could be in the United States, left to right. On the left-hand side, Shimin depicts the brokenness of the nation. Dooming factories billowing smoke into the sky. The haunting eye contact from a mass of poor people in shades of gray. A pair of men asleep, contorted, in the shadows. All of these situations, and the systems that are designed to support them, are in the eyes of the artists where justice is absent.

On the right-hand side are images of the activities that lead to the construction of a just land. Note the brown hands holding the tools for reconstruction in the America of the late 1930s, decades before African Americans even had the right to vote. And see women alongside men, laying blueprints out for a just land. See the scientists, male and female, white and brown, innovating a just future. And enjoy the playfulness in the top right corner in a green land with clean air.

Finally, in the center, a mother and her child.¹

Both artists depicted a day when there would be no more fear, when creation would be healed from the brokenness that it experiences. It was also the word of hope spoken to and by Isaiah in a time when the people of Israel were under siege by foreign armies,

¹Sigmon, Casey Thornburgh. *Commentary on Isaiah 11:1-10*

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/second-sunday-of-advent/commentary-on-isaiah-111-10-5> Accessed November 28, 2020

their country and way of life threatened. In fact, after this passage was written the people were taken into captivity and completely expelled from their country by the Babylonian Empire. If ever there was fear it was in this time.

Yet even in the midst of the doom and gloom that the prophet Isaiah speaks there is this image of hope. Just prior to the beginning of our reading the scripture talks of forests being hacked down and the majestic trees of Lebanon falling. Out of this destruction comes the image of a shoot from the stock or stump of Jesse. The last sentence of the scripture again references the root of Jesse. Jesse was King David's father. King David was considered the greatest king of Israel and so when the people were oppressed, they would hope for a Messiah, a King like David.

The people would have heard this passage and immediately understood it to be about hope, hope for a ruler like David who could lead and protect the people from outside forces. A leader who had fear of the Lord, in other words, had a deep respect for God, reverence of God, and was in awe of God. This because peace and justice were present when the leaders of Israel looked to God for wisdom, guidance, counsel, might, and knowledge.

The last line in stanza one of the hymn, *O little town of Bethlehem* is, "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." From the time that our scriptures talk about creation and man and woman eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, humanity has lived in fear. The circumstances of our fear change. Often times fears come from outside forces whether global or in our homes, that threaten our very being. Sometimes it is other nations or governments, sometimes it is nature itself. Sometimes it is something we know little about, like Corona Virus. Often times the fears come from within us. We fear our lack of ability and likeability. We fear the darkness of illness, mental, physical, social, or spiritual. Sometime we don't even know why the fear is there, we just know fear, and it can overwhelm a person.

Fear and human nature are inextricably bound together, but one could argue that though hope can fade, hope is also present. Recall the anxiety of the recent election in the US, and how people who supported either side had hope for a certain kind of future. Now the president elect is trying to bring hope to all, not just those who voted in his favour. He is using unifying language to bring hope for change.

With Covid – 19 our sure and certain hope is for a vaccine that will allow us to return to a sense of normalcy, a time when we can once again do things that human being do, touch one another, break bread together, gather and hug! We have people who are urging us to pay attention to climate change, to our use of resources, and how we dispose of things. They hope for a time when creation can be healed and respected.

For some individuals hope is all they have, but even hope can be buried, needing to be unearthed by a helpful counselor, kind friend, or concerned family member. Hope is what Christians trust as we approach death. The hope that in death we are brought fully into the presence of the God who loves us.

Hope and fear, both part of the human experience. The hopes and fears of all the years, all people have known it. No generation has been spared fear, but all have hoped for a better life, a better world. It is what spurs immigrants and refugees. Hope for a better life, a better world.

Scriptures such as this one from Isaiah, have brought hope to God's people. For the people of Israel, they have hoped for a king, a wise ruler as described in this passage. As Christians we look back and read into these words a description of the one who has come in the form of a child at Christmas.

Recall that image described at the beginning, the one called *Contemporary Justice and the Child*. The mother and child were in the center of the picture.

For Christians, the child at the center of our hope is Jesus. It all changes with the birth of this child, one who is called Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God with us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16. This is the hope in which we live and move and have our being. We hope in Jesus, we hope in God, because we know this life is not what God intended for us at the time of creation. But it is what God intends for us when all this comes to a close whether in another time or in our death.

The Spirit of the Lord rested on Jesus, he had the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Jesus, the one who was, and is, and is to come. Our hope today and always. This is hope that we come to know, trust, and live in. This hope can dispel fear. Hope doesn't take away fear, not yet, but it can drive fear away, because our hope is in Jesus who knows us and work in, with, and through us, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The following commentary on the Edward Hicks paintings of *The Peaceable Kingdom* from journalist and freelance editor Victoria Jones are a fitting close as we head into the season of Advent and Christmas. She writes, "Today we live between the two advents of Christ. The Prince of Peace has come as a little child to tame our wild hearts, but somehow peace still seems so elusive. Edward Hicks wrestled constantly with the tension between the already and not-yet aspects of Christ's kingdom, and we are called to do the same. So let us look back to the manger birth and forward to the eschaton [the second coming of Christ], meanwhile living in the light of him whose law is love, and whose gospel is peace."² Amen.

Closing Prayer

Merciful God, the signs of our times are worrisome.

We gather in your presence,

aware that the earth groans in pain and many people are suspicious of each other.

We thank you for your comforting presence in times of suffering and uncertainty, and for your promise of life beyond death, and hope beyond fear.

As the longest night of this year draws nearer,

² [Victoria Emily Jones](https://artandtheology.org/2016/12/06/the-peaceable-kingdoms-of-edward-hicks/). *The Peaceable Kingdoms of Edward Hicks*

<https://artandtheology.org/2016/12/06/the-peaceable-kingdoms-of-edward-hicks/> Accessed November 28, 2020.

comfort those who dread the darkness and direct those who have lost their way. Wherever people are overwhelmed by the demands of this season and the complications of COVID-19, let them hear your still small voice within all the clamour and confusion, and catch a glimpse of your light shining in the night.

God of all our days and nights,
we remember that the days leading up to Christmas are difficult for many, especially this year.

We pray for those who are hungry and cold.

Alert us to the ways that we can set a feast
for those in our community and beyond whose cupboards are bare.

Warm them with your love.

We pray for those who are grieving.

Make us patient and compassionate companions to those in mourning,
even when we're not sure what to say.

Fill emptiness with your comfort.

We remember those who are feeling very isolated this year.

Inspire our hearts with ideas of how to reach out in friendship.

Bring hope to the lonely with your friendship.

We pray for those who feel like the world is ending;
whose lives have been uprooted by fire, flood, or storm,
illness, job loss or death.

Steady us amid the upheavals of this year of pandemic
and remind us that you alone are constant.

Your steadfast love will see us through.

Heaven and earth may pass away,

but you are the source of everlasting life and undiminished hope.

Help us trust in you, no matter what is happening.

And now we pray together, using the words that Jesus taught us:

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

We enter Advent today amid the advertising of the season, tempting us to buy gifts, suggesting new desires to satisfy our longing. But God has given us the love that truly

satisfies in Christ Jesus. And so we offer whatever we have to share, knowing these gifts can fill the deepest hungers in the world God loves and bring hope to lives in despair. ©The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Worship Planner. 1st Sunday in Advent, November 29, 2020 Year B.

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For all that we experience and are dealing with in our lives and as we watch what is happening in our world, we can trust that the hopes and fears of all the years are firmly held in God's loving care.

Hymn

O little town of Bethlehem

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1. O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by:
yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.
2. For Christ is born of Mary,
and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all on earth.
3. How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings born of heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still
the dear Christ enters in.
4. O holy child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in;
be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell;
oh come to us, abide with us,
our Lord, Emmanuel.

Words and music: public domain

Benediction

On this pilgrimage of uncertainty,
**may we remember God has walked
this road many times before.**

As we live through these endless moments,
**may we remember Jesus shares hope
with us every day, every day.**

In this season filled with isolation from others,
**may we remember that the Spirit
knows our loneliness and cradles us in love.**

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